



## Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance

Dear Representative Tercyak, Senator Gomes, and distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee,

My name is Alok Bhatt. I am an activist with the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance (CIRA), a grassroots network of organizations and individuals fighting for the rights of all immigrants in the State of Connecticut, regardless of status or identity. Our memberships includes community activists, service providers, nonprofit, advocacy, labor, faith, student, and groups, as well as other diverse allies.

In reinforcing the rights of our community members and all workers in the State of Connecticut, CIRA writes in strong support of SB 914: An Act Concerning An Employer's Failure to Pay Wages (SB 914), and SB 1037: An Act Concerning Employee Liens Against Employers for Unpaid Wages (SB 1037).

SB 914 concerns bad actor employees who withhold proper wages from their employees. As detailed in Unidad Latina en Accion's (ULA) recent report, "Connecticut's Wage Theft Crisis: Stories & Solutions", immigrants, many of whom occupy low-paying jobs in restaurants, salons, and in hospitality and service, are often the victims of abusive and unfair employers<sup>1</sup>. We hear stories from people in the community who have suffered not only physical and emotional abuse, or sexual harassment, but also withheld wages. CIRA cannot allow our friends and neighbors to experience such hardships without any protection from the State.

Connecticut needs a policy that enables all workers to collect their proper pay, and disincentivizes malicious employer practices. If employers are required only to pay back

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ulanewhaven.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Wage-Theft-Report.pdf>

wages, they face no true consequence for their misdeeds. Therefore CIRA strongly agrees with the provision of SB 914 dealing double damages to abusive employers. We find that the this provision also shifts the burden of proof onto employers fairly, requiring only the amount of unpaid wages if the employer demonstrates good faith. Considering the abuses workers suffer, and the inherent balance of power in the employer-employee relationship, CIRA consider SB 914 a sound solution to the crisis of wage theft in Connecticut.

CIRA also supports SB 1037. This bill would enable employees to place a lien on an employer's property for stolen or withheld wages, thereby preventing employers from manipulating assets to avoid paying their workers. ULA's aforementioned report summarizes the multiple stories of workers who could not legally collect on judgments in their favor because employers filed for bankruptcy, or used other financial subterfuge. Our laws should protect the rights of both workers and employers, not enable the abuse of low-wage workers through smoke-and-mirrors. We refer to ULA's report attached for further information on the effectiveness of employee lien policies, and examples of wage theft from the community,

We greatly appreciate the Committee's consideration of this pressing issues impacting workers rights in the State of Connecticut. For further details on CIRA's positions on these bills, or in general, I can be contacted at 860-324-0086, or [al0k.s.b@gmail.com](mailto:al0k.s.b@gmail.com).

Respectfully submitted,

Alok Bhatt